

ACTIVATING THE 42D CLEARANCE COMPANY

By Captain Michael C. Bradwick



On 6 January 2010 at Warner Barracks in Bamberg, Germany, a platoon sergeant and an assistant operations officer received assignments as the initial first sergeant and commander of the newest company in the U.S. Army Engineer Regiment—the 42d Clearance Company. With an activation date of 16 February 2010, the race began to gather as much information as possible and establish the company footprint at the Warner Barracks garrison.

What Should Have Happened

While still maintaining jobs in their respective companies, the two leaders found time to plan the establishment of the 42d Clearance Company within the 54th Engineer Battalion. Without the unit's official modified table of organization and equipment, the leaders used a standard clearance company table to determine what resources the unit would need. To help plan and control the activation, the leaders used numerous key documents and tracking mechanisms that all activating units should create or obtain and revise from other activating units.

The first document created, the "Company Milestones Tracker," contained the key tasks and goals required to become a fully functioning company. It included corresponding task suspense dates for all staff sections within the battalion headquarters. Examples included—

- Activating the company's unit identification code.
- Determining a location for the unit's arms room, barracks, office space, motor park, and motor pool.
- Fielding the Property Book Unit Supply Enhanced System and Standard Army Maintenance System-Enhanced.

- Establishing supply and maintenance accounts.
- Procuring the unit guidon.

Other documents created to expedite and track the activation process included forward-thinking flowcharts, decision point models, and the initial long-term training calendar.

To meet the key tasks for activating the unit, senior leaders in the battalion advocated "leaders before Soldiers" through video teleconferences with higher-unit personnel sections. The interim commander and first sergeant advocated taking a conditions-based approach and establishing a focal group of eight leaders before the company's arrival. A conditions-based approach allowed the leaders to manage the fight without worrying about the overwhelming problems that could ensue if numerous Soldiers and equipment arrived en masse. Emplacing eight leaders before the arrival of the unit's junior Soldiers would allow a smooth transition. The command team insisted on having these eight initial leaders:

- Company commander.
- Executive officer.
- First sergeant.
- Operations sergeant.
- Motor sergeant.
- Supply sergeant.
- Armorer.
- Maintenance clerk.

If these eight leaders arrived before the remainder of the company's Soldiers, the company could theoretically

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build from the company's garrison footprint, establish internal systems, and create an initial training plan based on the arrival of platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, squad leaders, and Soldiers.

The window of opportunity to establish the company's systems, garrison footprint, and training plan required 2 to 3 months. For example, the motor sergeant, supply sergeant, and maintenance clerk needed time to establish their maintenance and supply systems to allow the company to receive equipment. Ideally, the company would then receive the platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and midlevel leaders, along with a moderate number of Soldiers to receive equipment and perform the various work details that arise in building a new company. Once equipment arrived, the supply sergeant would sign the equipment down to sub-hand receipt holders or band, seal, and store the equipment until those leaders arrived. Having sub-hand receipt holders on site would allow the company to set up its command supply discipline program earlier rather than later. Most supply sergeants and leaders would argue that this option is preferable.

What Actually Happened

General George S. Patton said, "A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan executed next week." As in most military operations, time was a vital asset during the activation and an 80 percent solution executed sooner was better than a 100 percent solution executed later. Events transpired differently than the interim command team envisioned. On its activation date, the 42d Clearance Company's leadership team included just five of the eight leaders identified as critical. From that date, the team had only about 20 days before the Department of the Army's Human Resources Command began sending Soldiers to the company. Most of them were recent graduates of advanced individual training (AIT). Along with the influx of new Soldiers, they also sent reclassified noncommissioned officers who had graduated from the same AIT course as the Soldiers they would eventually lead. During their window of opportunity, the interim commander, first sergeant, and motor sergeant effectively emplaced plans for the company's barracks, office space, motor pool, motor park, initial long-term training plan, and training calendar.

As Soldiers arrived over the next 2 months, the company became established and the command gave it additional barracks and office space. The company's housing situation became a delicate balancing act as the installation found Family housing and barracks space for the new Soldiers. In the end, everyone had a place to live and work. Just 6 weeks after the company's activation, its numbers increased to more than 110 of the 190 Soldiers authorized, with only eight leaders in the rank of sergeant or higher. Cohort manning such as this, coupled with a high Soldier-to-leader ratio, dramatically affected the quality of initial training and the integration of the Soldiers' Families. The first two staff sergeants in the 42d Clearance Company each led platoons of 40 to 50 Soldiers during the first



A medic in the 42d Clearance Company plays the role of prisoner during 54th Engineer Battalion training.

2 months after activation. The command normally assigns staff sergeants as squad leaders, in charge of eight-Soldier squads. The unit's sponsorship program quickly eroded as Soldiers arrived to the unit too quickly for the Soldiers already in-processed to sponsor them. For a new company to effectively integrate and sponsor incoming Soldiers and Families, numerous knowledgeable leaders must arrive and in-process first. The Human Resources Command should assign Soldiers to the new unit slowly enough that the command can establish a core of personnel to sponsor new arrivals. Without these necessary steps, the unit will experience poor integration of the Army's most valuable resource—its Soldiers and their Families.

Despite the initial lack of key leaders, the 42d Clearance Company pressed forward with its initial goals and individual training timeline. Field Manual 7-0, *Training for Full Spectrum Operations*,¹ outlines the Army Force Generation force pools of "RESET," "train/ready," and "available." Because the company's mission in combat is route and area clearance, its leaders felt pressure to activate, train, and deploy as quickly as possible. An activating company would thus fall into a modified path toward deployment. RESET—limited to 6 months for redeploying units—must be adjusted accordingly for newly formed units to receive personnel and equipment and conduct individual training.

During the first few months of activation, the 42d Clearance Company received few vehicles to begin driver



A team leader in the 42d Clearance Company trains Soldiers on the Husky vehicle-mounted mine detector during a situational training exercise.

training, but did receive some individual and protective equipment, such as weapons, night vision devices, optics, and protective masks. This equipment is vital to the initial individual training phase that a unit presses through upon return from a deployed theater of operations. The company received much of its equipment in the latter stages of activation, and the early lack of equipment created training challenges. The company's final training difficulties stemmed from the Army's failure to field route and area clearance companies with the equipment they require. To train on this equipment, clearance company Soldiers must deploy to training centers (such as the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, or the Joint Multinational Readiness Center at Hohenfels, Germany) or attend training (such as the route reconnaissance and clearance courses at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri). Commanders must develop plans to overcome this training obstacle.

By summer 2010, the 42d Clearance Company finally looked like a company in RESET. The unit still struggled with several key personnel issues, but was moving toward "train/ready." The company's Soldier-to-leader ratio remained imbalanced; but in the first 4 months of activation, the unit, leaders, and Soldiers learned many new aspects of team building, along with the difficulties and benefits of activating a unit.

Difficulties in Unit Activation

Several difficulties come with activating a new company. While every new unit is different, many similarities exist. First, all activating units must conduct Family and Soldier integration. Great units have systems in place for the reception and integration of new Soldiers. Without a Family readiness group, this task is

the responsibility of the few unit leaders. Managing an effective sponsorship program should remain a top priority in terms of integration. Second, all new units must build and maintain systems. Creating systems from the ground up is a challenging task, but does not necessarily need to be accomplished alone. For example, all units should forge and maintain bonds with sister units. These relationships can result in quid pro quo arrangements that benefit everyone. Bonds with sister companies within the battalion helped the 42d Clearance Company establish administrative and operational tracking systems. Once the 42d had matured, it would return the favor to those companies in the form of weapons ranges, shared training events, and assistance in work details.

Other difficulties the 42d Clearance Company experienced included the arrival of new and relatively inexperienced Soldiers, the late arrival of key leaders and experienced noncommissioned officers, and the late arrival of equipment for individual training. These problems affected the first few months of initial training. Sending leaders before Soldiers should remain a priority for activating units.

Benefits of Unit Activation

There are positive aspects of activating a new unit. Most Soldiers will attest that building a company and leaving behind a legacy remains a highlight of their careers. The ability to positively affect and take ownership of the work environment is an experience unavailable in other rigid, existing organizations.

This leads right into the next benefit with activating a new unit—unique developmental opportunities. While

rigid, existing organizations sometimes operate with a very top-down approach, an activating unit can foster bottom-up feedback, as witnessed by the Soldiers in the 42d Clearance Company. Because senior leaders arrived later in the activation process, midlevel and junior leaders had more input than normal. These same midlevel leaders acquired a hidden benefit in receiving an abundance of new Soldiers at one time—the ability to train inexperienced, new Soldiers. Because inexperienced Soldiers are more likely to be attentive to new ideas and training, leaders taught and enforced new fundamentals without the burden of bad habits from previous units. The 42d Clearance Company ensured that key leaders understood and executed proper training management as they developed training plans. For example, the first sergeant ensured that all noncommissioned officers established standardized counseling packets and performed monthly performance counseling to standard.

Additionally, all leaders enforced troop leading procedures during the training events. The first sergeant established precombat checks and inspection standards for individuals, equipment, teams, and specific mission requirements. An initial company objective was to ensure that leaders and Soldiers knew the proper way to run training meetings, conduct counseling, and perform mission preparation. In all of these areas, the new company reaped the benefits of having Soldiers who lacked bad habits from earlier assignments.

Finally, the increased responsibility and stress placed on junior leaders produced a long-term benefit in increased operational knowledge and a strengthened support structure within the company. Because every leader in the 42d Clearance Company understood and served in positions one to two pay grades above their true grades, support channels were in place by the time the actual leadership arrived. As leaders arrived, the situation simply improved because junior leaders already understood the stresses and responsibilities that leaders experience daily. The result was a support network capable of accomplishing complex missions without constant guidance and oversight.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A new unit requires the fielding of an initial core or nucleus of critical leaders. The interim command team initially believed that a group of eight key leaders should be in place before the arrival of Soldiers. Immediately after the interim command team assumed their permanent roles as executive officer and platoon sergeant, they added the recommendation that platoon leaders and platoon sergeants be in place before the arrival of Soldiers. The addition of four platoon leaders and four platoon sergeants, for an initial key group of sixteen leaders, would have lessened the burden on the initial eight leaders. Based on this revised proposal of 16 key leaders, the 42d Clearance Company received only five—or 31 percent—of them. A lesson learned from the experiences

of the first two squad leaders—who were each in charge of 40 to 50 Soldiers—was that having sufficient platoon leaders and platoon sergeants would have been a great help. New Soldiers from AIT need structure, and since Soldier in-processing is best handled by platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and squad leaders, these leaders should be in place before Soldiers arrive at the unit.

If the activating unit cannot realistically expect such leaders to be assigned in a timely manner, then cross-leveling skills and leaders with higher headquarters should be at the forefront of the plan. Cross-leveling leaders eases many of the problems associated with building the team, integrating new Soldiers, and establishing the unit's footprint on an installation. Incorporating leaders from higher or adjacent units into the activating unit smooths the initial learning curve associated with specific standing operating procedures within the headquarters and in the community. Also, integrating experienced specialists into an activating unit should remain a consideration, since they can provide guidance for Soldiers fresh from AIT.

Also, the Army should field equipment during the second to third month of activation. Thus, in the 42d Clearance Company's situation, equipment would have arrived after the initial 16 leaders arrived and established the garrison footprint, which included the motor pool, motor park, and supply and maintenance systems. Sending equipment to the leaders of an activating unit before the arrival of junior Soldiers allows the supply sergeant time to sign equipment down to sub-hand receipt holders. It also allows individual training to begin when the Soldiers newly arrived from AIT complete in-processing. After the unit footprint, leadership, and equipment are either established or emplaced, then the Soldiers should arrive.

Finally, a schedule based on conditions, rather than time, should decide the way forward for an activating unit. If the command cannot meet certain conditions, the activation should be delayed to avoid overburdening the leaders on the ground. The fielding of the 42d Clearance Company occurred in a cohort manner with Soldiers arriving from AIT lacking some basic skills and training. Driver training should be incorporated into basic or AIT, since it would relieve the gaining unit of responsibility for standing up a driver training program before the arrival of vehicles and qualified trainers. If units only needed to conduct Soldier road tests on vehicles, Soldiers could contribute to the company's overall mission much sooner.

Captain Bradwick graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 2007. He was tasked with temporarily commanding and standing up the 42d Clearance Company before taking over as company executive officer. Captain Bradwick then served in Afghanistan as a liaison officer in Regional Command-East. He is currently at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, attending the Engineer Captains Career Course.